Valley First
CREDIT UNION

Budgeting for the Holidays: Give More, Stress Less

The holidays are a time for making memories, connecting with loved ones, and celebrating traditions that matter. But between gifts, food, travel, decorations, parties, and other seasonal expenses, holiday spending can add up quickly.

A little planning can help you enjoy the season while staying focused on your financial goals. Here are a few ways to celebrate with intention and keep your budget on track.

Start With One Holiday Spending Limit

Before making your gift list, decide how much you can comfortably afford to spend on the entire holiday season. Remember, gifts are only part of the equation.

Your holiday budget may also need to account for:

- Food and entertaining
- Travel
- Decorations
- Events and activities
- Clothing
- Charitable giving
- Wrapping and shipping
- Other unexpected expenses

Once you've chosen an overall amount, divide it among the categories that matter most to you. Starting with the total can help you prioritize your spending before the season gets busy.

Make a Gift-Giving Plan

Before you start shopping, create a list of who you're buying for and set a spending amount for each person.

Ask yourself:

- Who am I buying for?
- How much can I spend?
- What do I plan to give?
- Where will I buy it?

Having a plan can make it easier to avoid impulse purchases and those tempting "just one more thing" moments.

Remember, Meaningful Gifts Don't Have to Be Expensive

Not every great gift needs to come in a box.

Consider giving something that costs little or nothing but still shows you care, such as:

- A homemade meal or treats

- Babysitting
- Help with a project
- A family experience
- One-on-one time
- A handmade gift
- A coupon for a helpful service

Sometimes, giving your time can be just as meaningful as something purchased at a store.

Watch for Holiday Spending Traps

Sales, last-minute shopping, credit card rewards, and buy now, pay later options can make it easy to spend more than you intended.

Before making a purchase, pause and ask yourself:

- Did I budget for it?
- Do I really want or need it?
- Can I afford it without creating debt?

If the answer is no, give yourself permission to pause. A sale isn't necessarily a good deal if it's something you weren't planning to buy in the first place.

Use Credit With Care

Credit cards can be useful financial tools, but holiday purchases can become expensive when balances carry over long after the celebrations are over.

Before using credit, consider how and when you'll repay the purchase. Your goal should be to enjoy the holidays today without creating unnecessary financial stress for yourself tomorrow.

Give With Intention

A holiday budget isn't about taking the joy out of the season. It's about deciding what matters most before you spend.

Focus your time and money on the people, experiences, and traditions that mean the most to you. Thoughtful planning can help you enjoy the season while continuing to protect the financial future you're working toward.

Need Help With Your Financial Goals?

You don't have to navigate your finances alone. Valley First's Certified Credit Union Financial Counselors are available to provide personalized financial guidance and support.

Connect with a Valley First financial counselor:

valleyfirstcu.org/certified-credit-union-financial-counselors